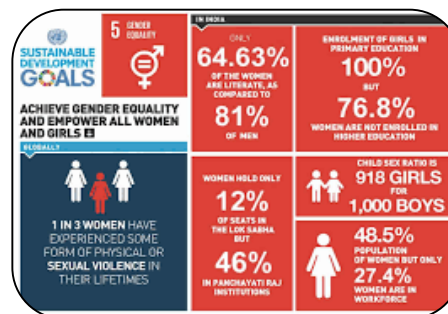




CHANGING LEADERSHIP OF WOMEN IN THE FORMATION OF INDIA: SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGS) AND WOMEN

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ABSTRACT:

Since ancient times, women have played a significant role in nation-building by contributing to social, political, educational, and economic transformations. At various times, they have even sacrificed their lives while fulfilling their duties. In the development of modern India, women's leadership has continuously evolved—from strengthening the democratic system to becoming an integral part of the educational sphere and increasing women's economic independence. In this research paper, the researcher studies the role of women in the making of India from ancient times to the present era.

Keywords: Nation-building, Transformation, Women's Leadership, Economic Independence, Democracy

INTRODUCTION

At the threshold of the 21st century, women play a vital role in shaping a technologically advanced modern India. In almost every field of life, women have begun to prove their abilities alongside men. Today, women who are reaching new heights—even exploring space—were once deprived of self-development due to various restrictions on their participation and achievements.

In earlier times, women were confined to domestic roles, believing that their world revolved around household responsibilities. However, in the 19th century, through the relentless efforts of Mahatma Jyotiba Phule and Savitribai Phule, women became part of the educational system. Various social reformers challenged rigid social customs and traditions, which contributed significantly to women's progress. By the mid-20th century, women began actively contributing toward family development, social progress, and national development.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the status of women and women's leadership in ancient, medieval, and modern periods.
2. To examine the Sustainable Development Goals.
3. To study the role of women in social development.

Status and Leadership of Women in Ancient Times

During the early Rigvedic period, women enjoyed a status equal to that of men. They had the right to receive Vedic education and to undergo the Upanayana ceremony. They could participate in

religious rituals and yajnas along with their husbands. Women also had the freedom to choose their life partners through the practice of *Swayamvara*.

However, during the later Vedic period, restrictions were imposed on women's social and religious rights, and their access to education declined. Women were largely confined to household work and were prohibited from participating in assemblies or political gatherings. The preference for male children increased, leading to the emergence of practices such as child marriage and the purdah system.

During the Buddhist and Jain periods, women received some degree of religious freedom. In the Mauryan and Gupta periods, issues such as the practice of Sati and restrictions on property rights became more prevalent. Only women from royal families had access to higher education and administrative authority.

Gargi and Maitreyi were prominent female philosophers of the Vedic period who made remarkable contributions to spirituality and philosophy in ancient India.

Status and Leadership of Women in the Medieval Period

The medieval period is often considered a dark age for women's freedom. During this time, numerous restrictions were imposed on women. Harmful practices such as the purdah system, child marriage, Sati, Jauhar, lack of education, and dependency increased. Due to foreign invasions and changing social and political circumstances, women's rights were further restricted.

Despite these challenges, several women demonstrated remarkable leadership. Razia Sultan, the first female ruler of Delhi; Chand Bibi; Rani Durgavati; and Nur Jahan displayed administrative and military excellence.

Similarly, Jijabai, who supported Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj in establishing Swarajya, and Maharani Tarabai, who led the Maratha resistance against Aurangzeb, played significant roles in history. In the same period, women saints such as Sant Muktabai, Sant Janabai, and Mirabai made important contributions to spirituality and literature, leaving a lasting impact on society.

Status of Women in the Modern Period

From the 19th century to the present, the condition of Indian women has steadily progressed toward empowerment. The journey that began with educational and social reforms has now extended to fields such as space and technology.

Savitribai Phule, with the support of Jyotirao Phule, laid the foundation of women's education by establishing schools for girls. Raja Ram Mohan Roy played a key role in abolishing the Sati practice, while Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar secured legal recognition for widow remarriage, improving the lives of widows.

The transformation in education also led to achievements such as Anandibai Joshi becoming one of India's first female doctors, marking the beginning of women's participation in modern medicine.

In the 20th century, women actively participated in India's freedom struggle, spreading political awareness. Rani Lakshmibai of Jhansi, Kasturba Gandhi, Sarojini Naidu, and Aruna Asaf Ali bravely fought against British rule.

In 1950, the Indian Constitution granted women equal voting rights, which became a milestone in social transformation. Rights such as equality, inheritance rights, and adoption rights significantly empowered women.

Reservation for women ranging from 33% to 50% in local self-government institutions helped create strong political leadership among women. Today, women are visible in every sector. Leaders such as Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, President Pratibha Patil, President Droupadi Murmu, and Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman have played significant roles in politics.

Women such as Kalpana Chawla and Sunita Williams have reached great heights in science and space technology. In sports, athletes like P. V. Sindhu, Mary Kom, and Mithali Raj have brought global recognition to India. Entrepreneurs such as Sudha Murty and Falguni Nayar have also made remarkable contributions in the business world.

Sustainable Development Goals

In 2015, the United Nations established the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to ensure the holistic and sustainable development of the world.

The SDGs include objectives such as reducing poverty, providing quality education, improving healthcare, achieving gender equality, maintaining a clean environment, and promoting economic development and social justice.

Gender equality is a crucial component of sustainable development. Women play a vital role in building an equitable society. In such a society, there is no discrimination based on gender, caste, religion, economic status, or social background. Every individual receives equal opportunities and rights.

ROLE OF WOMEN IN SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

1. Social Transformation through Education

Women's education contributes not only to their personal growth but also to the development of families and society. Education helps improve health, hygiene, economic stability, and social awareness.

2. Economic Transformation

Economically empowered women contribute to their own development as well as to the development of their families and society. They help reduce social inequality. Self-help groups, small-scale industries, entrepreneurship, and employment opportunities strengthen the economy.

3. Family Health Management

Women play a crucial role in managing family health. Their contribution in nutrition, childcare, and health awareness is significant.

4. Environmental Conservation

Women play an important role in biodiversity conservation, water conservation, and maintaining cleanliness.

5. Leadership and Decision-making

Women's participation in local self-governance strengthens democracy. They actively participate in politics and social organizations.

6. Equal Rights

Women challenge discriminatory traditions and social evils and actively struggle to achieve equal rights.

CONCLUSION

The increasing participation of women in all fields of modern society is a matter of pride for India. Their growing involvement has transformed family structures, social systems, and political dynamics.

Women have become more confident in decision-making processes. Women who once managed only household responsibilities are now making their mark in the Panchayati Raj system and various public institutions.

Without the existence and participation of women, the vision of national development cannot be fully realized. Just like men, women also play an equally important role in the development of India.

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